

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY**

INFORMANT: MARY LAFERRIERE

INTERVIEWER: DOUG REYNOLDS

DATE: JANUARY 31, 1989

R = DOUG REYNOLDS

L = MARY LAFERRIERE

SG-BV-T125

[there is a loud static noise throughout the tape, and the informant speaks very softly, making it difficult or impossible to hear much of the tape]

R: (- -) have Mary Laferriere conducted in Uxbridge, Massachusetts on January 31, 1989. Mary, why don't you start by giving us some background on where you were born, what kind of family you came from, how many children, things like that, education.

L: I was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and I had one brother. It's only a family of four. My father's side of the family was always involved in textiles. My mother's side of the family always worked in textiles. My father's side of the family was involved in management. [unclear]. (R: Uh huh)

R: How old are you, may I ask?

L: Twenty-eight. (R: Twenty-eight)

R: Now what did y-, what did your father do? Briefly.

L: When, at what point? (R: Uh) Until after.

R: Mai-, mainly for his living, his income.

L: He operated a yarn processing company.

R: Was that in Woonsocket? (L: Yeah) What was the name of it?

L: Sabeco Incorporated.

R: Is it still in operation today?

L: No. (R: No; [unclear] is it) He's deceased, (R: Oh) shortly after that [unclear].

R: Sorry. Uh, what does your mother, what did she do?

L: My mother worked with him at one time at the company doing the bookkeeping for the company (R: Yeah) [unclear].

R: Now, did you go to college or anything?

L: Mm, I went to college for one year.

R: And you've worked ever since you left college? (L: Yes) Doing what?

L: I was a travel agent, for six years.

R: Where was that, Woonsocket?

L: In Providence. (R: Providence?) Um hm. (R: Okay) And after that I stayed home for a short time with my son. (R: Okay) And then I went to work for the Column [unclear].

R: That's the Woonsocket Column. The other paper. (L: Um hm) Okay, so you're married and have one child.

L: No, I'm divorced. (R: Okay)

R: Uhh, sorry about that, too.

L: [chuckles] I'm not. (R: Okay, anyway)

R: Um, now when did you go to work for the Column?

L: Um, May of 1987. (R: Okay; good)

R: What did you expect when you took the job?

L: I expected to have a job that um I wouldn't take home with me; one that I would find enjoyable and would give me enough money to survive on because I had planned to go back to school eventually, and I didn't want to take another career job. I just wanted to have another job to survive on.

R: Okay, when you say you wanted a job that was enjoyable, what, what do you mean by enjoyable?

L: Um, well, a job where I could do things that I was familiar with; things that would work with people; would w-have direct contact with people. I enjoy that. And, and I enjoyed writing, some of the writing aspect [unclear].

R: Wha-, what was your job at the paper?

L: Um, I coordinated the different, the three different branches of the paper. Of the main office at, at the bureau office, so Circulation Department, [unclear] and the Advertising Department. I handled the retail aspect.

R: Okay, so this would be doing all of that here in Uxbridge, and dealing with it in Woonsocket.

L: Um hm. Sending it there [unclear].

R: How would you view your [Ms. Laferriere clears throat] work? As professional, or clerical?

L: Clerical.

R: Why?

L: [pause: 5 sec.] I don't know. That's just the way we [unclear].

R: And there, is there anything in particular that, that makes it clerical rather than a professional job?

L: Maybe because I don't have any professional training to do it. I'm not (- -) One really wouldn't require any professional training to do it.

R: Okay, so you've done this for how long, eighteen months now?

L: Yeah [unclear].

R: Have you enjoyed it? (L: Yes) It's what you expected? (L: Yes) What did your work mean to you? I mean (- -)

L: It meant, [unclear]. It didn't have a whole lot of [unclear]

R: Anything else?

L: No, [laughs] that's rea-, was really my sole purpose for it, and uh, that's about what I meant.

R: Now last week you got notification from the paper. [pause: 3 sec.] What?

L: [chuckles] I'm wondering what this, just wondering (- -)

R: Oh, that, that your job was being eliminated. (L: Right) Can you describe that for me?

L: Describe what?

R: What happened and how you felt. How did they go about doing it?

L: One of the people in management told Lisa that my job was going to be [unclear] reporter and [unclear]. And um, no mention with me, to me until much later that same week. She told me because she felt, well it would be nice for me to know. And later that day they called me, for me to come in. They were eliminating the position. They said it didn't work out. And later I found out through conversations that some of management had with other people that it was because of budget cuts.

R: Do you think the paper is in trouble?

L: I don't know. I don't think it's in any danger at all of collapsing. It's probably facing a non-, monetary crisis but I [unclear].

R: When they, when they told you that the position didn't work out, what did they mean by that?

L: I don't know. They weren't very specific and they would not be more specific with me.

R: What do you think it meant?

L: I think it meant that they didn't want to tell me the real reason. They [unclear], but I don't think it's because it didn't work out. I think the job went just as it was supposed to go, and I think I produced just the results they expected me to produce. I think they just didn't want to [unclear].

R: Why do you think they would hide that?

L: I don't know. Um (- -) [pause: 5 sec.]

R: What was your initial reaction to fi-, to finding out that you were being let go?

L: Surprise. And, uh I guess anxiety about the future. And then anger. I didn't feel that it was necessary. I don't think it had to happen.

R: Now how, they gave you two weeks notice, right?

L: No.

R: How much?

L: They gave me a little over a week.

R: A little over a week. What have you gone through since then?

L: Reconciling myself to the fact that I have to get another job. But at the same time evaluating the future to see if I, if that, if I'm at a point that I would like to make a decision about a, a career move in [unclear], in that direction instead of just a you know um sustenance job.

R: What, what, what leads you to this notion that you should be more professional, and avoiding the sustenance [unclear]?

L: Well, because I, I, the only reason I didn't do it before was because I had dealt with, I had just gotten separated, and had a son to support and, at the time I, there was nothing that I could say I really wanted to do. So my decision to take a job just for the money was so that I would have time to make that decision, you know get over all the problems of the divorce and, and being a single mother, and getting used to that, and sort of have a transition period I guess. Now I feel that that transition period has come to an end.

R: Are you ready to move on?

L: Yeah.

R: Do you think this is a blessing in disguise?

L: Mmm, no. But I think it provided me with the necessary impetus.

R: So you're pretty much open for anything now, aren't you? (L: Yeah) Are you going back to college? (L: Yes) When do you plan on starting?

L: Hopefully in the fall.

R: What has all this meant for your son?

L: [unclear]?

R: Well, the loss of income. Did that affect what you do at home?

L: Not right now. Not yet. And I don't expect that it will because I hope to be able to find another job.

R: How old is he?

L: He's five years old.

R: Is he in day care?

L: He's in kindergarten half a day and day care the rest of the time.

R: Day care is fairly expensive when you look at the wages that clerical workers make. (L: Um hm) Can you elaborate for me the relationship between wages and day care?

L: Well, I got paid very well for, for a part-time position, so I don't think I can use my wage to compare. But I, from wha-, from looking now at different jobs, because I, because I'm looking for another job, I've seen that the, the wages range between five and six dollars an hour, and it costs two dollars an hour for day care. So [unclear] you would take about half home.

R: Do you think this is going to mean changes if you have to take a lower paying job? (L: Yes) Where are you going to cut corners first?

L: But, um, I would cut cun-, corners on unnecessary extravagance and [unclear]. Maybe luxuries now, but you know, cut potato chips at the grocery store, and maybe ice cream. (R: Yeah)

R: What do you hope to major in in college?

L: Um, I was thinking of child development, child psychology, or behavioral sciences.

R: Do you think there's a career there for you? (L: Yes) More security?

L: I'm not sure. I don't know what the job market is like in those fields. But I, I feel confident in my abilities so that I would feel confident in getting a job in whatever field I chose.

R: How do you think people who experience layoffs and have children, do you think you're a typical case, your reactions?

L: I don't know. I, because I have a professional background in, in travel, I guess I feel that I could always fall back on that. People who don't have that in their history, you know in their background, I think would be much more devastated than I was about it.

R: Let's talk about your ex-, your background in travel. What kind of skills do you have that are marketable?

L: Well, besides my basic and thorough knowledge of the travel industry, um, I worked with a travel agency, um, I managed the office [unclear], so I have some management skills.

R: Now, can you name the company?

L: It's Church Travel.

R: In Providence.

L: In Providence. [unclear].

R: You were there six years you said? Why'd you leave?

L: Because I tired of that industry. It was very stressful. [unclear] just, burnout they call it in any industry and it's typical of higher stress industries and, it is difficult for a lot of people to believe that's a stressful industry. A lot of people are surprised when I say that.

R: It seems like there were, you got a lot of pleasure working in it. Am I wrong?

L: Um, I, most of my pleasure did not come from working in the actual tra-, I enjoyed managing it a great deal. I enjoyed being away from providing the travel services to the public.

R: What was there about managing it as opposed to (- -)

L: Because I didn't actually have to provide the travel [chuckles] services to the public I think. And um, I'm very well organized and I found that I could use that a lot more in management.

R: You were uh, you were, what made the providing services to the public so bad?

L: It, the nature of the industry. That you're providing a service, you are selling a service that you don't actually provide to the customer. I mean you're an agent to the management. You're only the middle man. I mean i-, you have to guarantee the, or, or try to become as experienced as you can about all the different aspects so that you can make intelligent choices for other people. Since you don't provide it, you are often responsible for their experiences, although you didn't, actually have anything to do with it.

R: So then y-, you became a clerical worker in a newspaper office. (L: Yeah) That's a pretty big leap.

L: But it, see I, I guess dealing with that much stress for so long, I was very happy to have a less stressful job.

R: You [unclear] emotionally [unclear]. Well that's interesting. Who, now we're going through another phase, right? What do you see for the future? Are you going to be okay?

L: Yes. And I'm very optimistic about looking for jobs. I, although I have some you know immediate concerns about getting a job, I don't really doubt that I will get one, and I, I don't really doubt that I will eventually get one that meets all my needs [unclear].

R: How long have you been looking?

L: Just about a week now.

R: How's it going?

L: Not too well.

R: What are you finding (- -)

L: Or not in, I shouldn't say not too well, I haven't exactly interviewed, but I haven't found um jobs that would pay enough to make it worthwhile.

R: Where are you looking?

L: Where [unclear] looking? The same types of fields, because I want to go to school, I, I don't really feel like I want to, like it's fair to um, you know offer [unclear] to somebody when I know that I'm [unclear].

R: Do you find yourself lying when you apply for jobs? (L: No) Do you find employers stringing you along sometimes?

L: Well, I can see that they're always putting their best you know face forward. And they always are very, they're always perfect employers, and [unclear].

R: You, you seem to have a, a note of suspicion about employers now. [both chuckle] What causes that?

L: It's, it's funny, I've, I've, my experience is that they've disappointed me in every single [unclear]. Of course I realize that everything can't be perfect but it goes beyond that, marginal leeway you know that you give for you know they're just having a bad day or [unclear] they're entitled to do things the way they want to because they're the boss.

R: That seems interesting. Wha- (- -)

L: Taking advantage of their employees. [chuckles]

R: Right. Is that what it is the boss taking advantage of employees?

L: I don't know, maybe it's not taking advantage. But I think dishonesty is um, a common thread. (R: No kidding) Yeah.

R: Why, why do you think that is?

L: I don't know. [chuckles]

R: Why, why do you think (- -)

L: [unclear]. I don't know. I don't know. Maybe they're afraid that if they're honest they'll [unclear]. (R: Um hm) In the lurch, I don't know.

R: Well they must feel threatened by something, don't you (L: Yeah) think?

L: I don't know what it is.

R: And that you found it in, in your situ- (- -)

L: In more than, yeah.

R: Yeah. Do you think it's out there everywhere?

L: I'm beginning to think so. I'm beginning to think it's the, it's definitely the exception [unclear] (R: Now are ther-, are you) that there's honest employers.

R: Yeah. I, I just, [Ms. Laferriere clears throat] I wonder, are these paranoid delusions or do you think (L: I don't know) other people realize this?

L: Well, I think in talking with other people that people feel, in large part that it's not much different wherever you go. That you know, some things may be better and some things may be worse but, it seems that there are similarities between most employers. Maybe medium, smaller companies it's not like that. I haven't worked in much smaller companies. The companies I've worked in are larger. (R: Yeah) Maybe it's because there are so many people involved in management.

R: Now your father was a mill manager. (L: Um hm) Do, do you think that was true in his case?

L: I don't know. I, I'd like to think so. I mean I'd like to think the best of him. (R: Yeah) Um, because the kind of things that he taught me seemed consistent with the way I'd like him, an employer to be with me: fair and up front. But I don't know because I, I didn't see him on a daily ba-, basis with his employees. (R: Yeah)

R: I want to change the subject (L: Okay) for a little bit. Were, you're, you're French descent, (L: Canadian) right? (L: Um hm) Can you um, uh give us some background on that? You (- -)

L: I, mine, specifically? (R: Oh no) My background?

R: Your grandparents and relations and everything.

L: Well, my father's side, Laferrieres, came from France to Canada, and then migrated down to the New England area (- -)

R: Was this your grandfather?

L: For work. No, not my grandfather. Through the years. I think that my grandfather's grandparents came from Canada to the Woonsocket area (R: I see) to work. And, and my

grandfather started his own business dyeing the yarn.

R: Where was that?

L: I think [unclear].

R: [unclear].

L: And then um, he died, and my father and his brother ran that for a little while, but that was, it was not doing well mostly because there was a lot of competition for his help. Because labor and [buzzing noise makes it difficult to hear] overhead costs were [unclear]. E-, most of the companies, the dyeing companies, were moving to the South. In the advent of synthetics I guess. Then he, then they opened a different type of [unclear]. And then (- -)

R: What do you mean a different (- -)

L: A different type of yarn. They ehh, developed a process themselves and built a machine themselves and, but I guess um, it wasn't profitable and they changed the yarn processing because they felt [unclear]

R: [both talk and laugh; unclear] Okay.

L: So, and then my mother's family, I don't really know. I think it may have been my grand-, my great grandparents you know came from Canada. [unclear]. My, on my mother's side, my maternal grandfather's family came from Canada. And they also came down to New England to work. They were from Lowell, Mass. And my mother's, my maternal grandmother's family came from Italy. And settled in southern Rhode Island, central Rhode Island.

R: These were all mill workers then.

L: All of them. All of them.

R: Any particular mills that were (- -)

L: I can't recall. My grandmother and my grandfather met at a mill. He was a [unclear]. They did. They worked together and he was a flirt. He'd flirt with her, and she was, (R: It's always) from her descr- (- -)

R: It's always the man isn't it? [interviewer seems to be hitting on informant]

L: But she, from her description she was rather a rebellious child. She got in a lot of trouble for it. Against her parents' wishes and threats she married a, someone who was Italian. (R: Really) Yeah.

R: What, were there any repercussions?

L: I don't know. I know that they, they weren't happy about it. I, I really don't know about the (- -) (R: Yeah) They died when um, her father died when she was, I don't think it was long after she got married.

R: Probably booed at the reception I would think. [Ms. Laferriere laughs]

L: I don't know, it sounds like a feast to most, most people [unclear].

R: [unclear]. That's good. That was a joke. (L: I know) What do you think they got out of their working lives? Do you think it's the same thing that you're getting?

L: [pause: 3 sec.] I don't think so. Although they had to work and they worked for the money, I know that when I listen to my grandmother talk about her work that it was obvious she took an awful lot of pride in what she did, you know, and that she did it with that in her mind that she was going to do the best work that she could and she had a lot of pride in it. I sh-, think that it wa-, it was a source of satisfac-, personal satisfaction to her as well as money.

R: Do you get any of that?

L: Not in this job. [laughs softly] But I do working in general [unclear]. (R: Yeah)

R: Do you think then that, the rewards then are, are similar in a lot of ways to what your grandparents get? (L: Yes) And yet you seem a little bitter about having been released. And you're suspicious of employers. Do you think that your grandparents too felt that way? (L: Yeh) Do (L: I do) you see any differences then?

L: Differences in the way they viewed their work situation and the way I view? (R: Yeah) I think that the major difference I would imagine is that they probably felt that they didn't have a lot of choices and I feel that I do.

R: That's interesting. Yeah. Why do you, why do you think that is?

L: Um, I think that they, except my grandfather did go on to another, except for the fact that my grandfather went on to another [unclear] um career, um, I think that at least my mother's, my grandmother's feeling was that this is what she knew best and this is the only thing that she could really do. And I think that she felt that it was [unclear] for her to learn a new trade; take the time to apprentice when she could be making more money as an experienced person in what she was doing. I think she felt that that income was important, so important to her that she couldn't have that option. (R: Good for you) [chuckles]

R: Um, now your mother, (L: Um hm) did she work in the mills?

L: No, she did not.

R: What did she do? She kept books?

L: She always was a bookkeeper. [unclear].

R: Did she go to college or anything? (L: No) She did go to private high school. I think the first one out of all my aunts and uncles. Or the only one that I know of, that went to private high school. I guess you, her parents wanted to give her opportunity (R: So you attribute) [unclear] a better education [unclear]. I think [unclear] a better education [unclear]. (R: Yeah)

R: Now did she earn wages that were comparable to you know to uh those of mill workers?

L: No, I don't know.

R: What kind of soc-, socio-, socioeconomic background did, would you say she came from?

L: Middle class. (R: Hm) Um.

R: What do you consider yourself?

L: Middle class. (R: Middle class) Um hm.

R: Working woman with one child [unclear]. Clerical [unclear]. [unclear]?

L: No.

R: It is.

L: Yeah, I would. (R: I, I don't) I don't know if it's typical. I don't know if most women are, have lower incomes than I do. I don't know.

R: Um, I marvel continuously at the fact that people say middle class who are working class. (L: Mm; oh, I see) Yeah. It's clear you know a woman with one child obviously doing clerical work.

L: No. I d-, I guess I, in my mind, it unclear. (R: Yeah) Maybe it could be interchangeable. I don't consider it would be possible unclear that.

R: I'm sure that's a valid conclusion.

L: Do you? [unclear].

R: Well, class is perceptions anyway. You know what your definition is may be different from another person's. What do you think about the future? Are you going to be okay?

L: Yes! [unclear]. (R: Great)

R: How about the future of the country?

L: Yes. I'm concerned about that.

R: Do you see yourself as being part of a larger trend? Company says "We have to be more efficient. Cut the staff." (L: No) No. I don't have anything else. Would you like to add anything?

L: No.

[end of tape]